

GATSCHE (A.S.)

SPECIMEN OF SONGS

OF THE

MODOC INDIANS

ALBERT S. GATSCHE

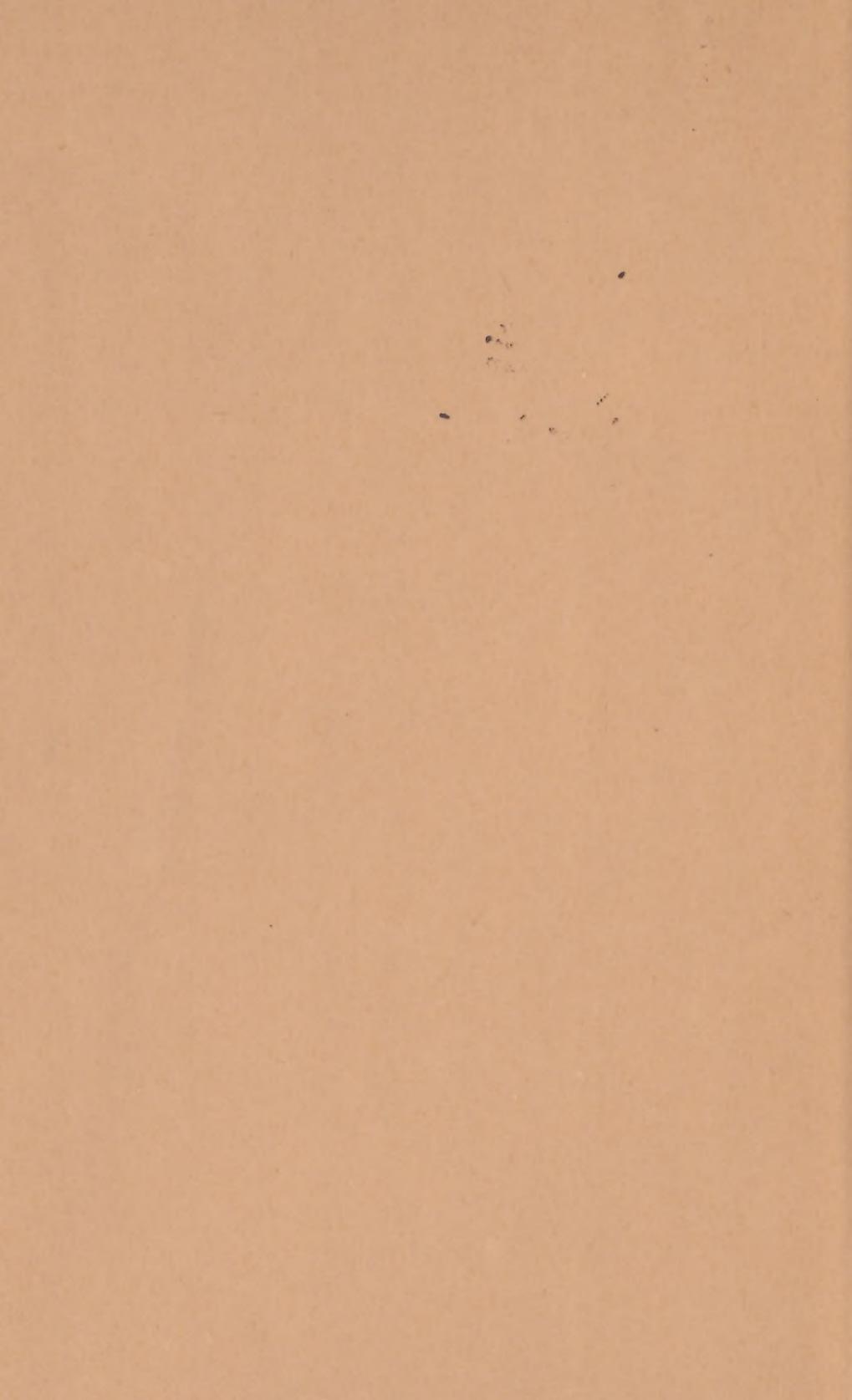


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SONGS OF THE MODOC INDIANS.

BY ALBERT S. GATSCHE.

During numerous conferences which the author has had in former years with Modoc Indians he was enabled to record from dictation a number of curious songs which they highly prize and frequently sing while either at work or sitting idly in their lodges. Only a few of them are of a lugubrious character; the majority are merry utterances of a mind free from care. There are erotic songs, dance-songs, satiric and mythologic songs, all being delivered in a way that is half spoken and half sung. Some, however, have attractive and elaborate melodies, which, if well arranged for the piano or string instruments, would doubtless produce a sensation in cultured communities.

I. Of the songs below, the first one is introduced as being sung or spoken by a small species of prairie-owl (*Speotyto hypogea*), which has the faculty of turning its head around and then turning it instantaneously to its normal position. The bird is therefore called in Modoc *rollhead* or *turnhead*, and, like everything else seemingly miraculous or unaccountable, is made the subject of songs and folk-stories. When this owl draws its body up it appears almost ball-shaped, and when it travels over the surface of the prairie seems like a light-colored ball rolling rapidly over the ground. This owl lives in the ground. It is referred to in two conjurers' songs published in my "Klamath Indians of Southwestern Oregon," I, p. 154 (Washington, 1890) as Nû'sh pilan tilalua'nsha, which signifies "as a head only I roll around," and (*ibid.*, I, p. 167) as Lu'paksh ge'-u mu'luash, "white chalk is my medicine tool," because the feathers of the bird are of a chalk-white or grayish shade.

In the song below, the man, after throwing off his garments and limbs, appears also as "a head only" and rolls on for many miles, when he is seen partaking of food inside of his subterranean lodge. Evidently the "hi'shuaksh," or young man, who had just carried his sister on his back to her bridegroom and left her close to a pine tree, had become exhausted by his exertions,

and to feel more free had thrown away all his clothing, then parted also with some of his limbs and was transformed into a "rollhead." The faithfulness of the dog is well sketched, and the whole song is somewhat dramatic, which is not generally characteristic of Indian songs. The songs of the Pacific slope Indians are usually much shorter than the following, not often exceeding two lines in length.

NUSH-TILANSNÄ-ASHAM SHUI'SH, THE SONG OF THE ROLL-HEAD OWL.

Hi'shuaksh tu'pakshash e'nank ge'pgapeli shuino'ta:
 A man (his) sister carrying on returned while singing

"Tchu'i hai tak nā nen kōsh tam'no'la."

"Just now we (have gone) to the pine and have returned from it."

Wa'tchag: "Wa-wā'-a-a'!"

Hi'shuaksh: Tchi'shka Äliu-iwa'ga, ge'pk'i, mish ta'la nū
 Dear pet Äliu-iwa'ga, come here, I just only wanted
gi'tki giu'g ak; pu'edsha nū kädshigo'ga. Shui'na:
 to tell (you); I throw away being exhausted. (Then) he sings:
 (my garments)

"Tchu'i hai' tak nā nen kōsh tam'no'la."

"We have just gone to the pine and came back from there."

Hi'shuaksh vutō'dshna wa'kshna.

The man throws away (his) moccasins.

Watcha'ga (Dog runs after the moccasins and brings them back): *Wa-wā-a-ā-a!*

Hi'shuaksh: Tchi'shka Äliu-iwa'ga, ge'pk'i, mish ta'la
 My little Äliu-iwa'ga, come to me, to you simply
nū gi'tki giu'g ak, pu'edsha nū kädshigo'ga, shui'na:
 I wanted to tell (that) I throw away being fatigued, says:
 (my limbs)

"Tchu'i hai ta'k nā nen kōsh tamēno'la."

"Presently we have come back from the pine."

Pu'edsha tcho'kash hi'shuaksh.

(Then) throws away (his) legs, the man.

Watcha'ga: (Dog runs after the legs): *Wa-wā-a-a'.*

When the man had thrown away not only his moccasins but both legs, and the faithful dog had run after them and brought them back to his master, at the same time barking *wa-wā-a-a'*, he also sacrificed his shirt, his hat, and both arms, repeating the words: *pu'edsha tchu'lish, tchu'yesh, wāk*: "*I cast away my shirt, my head-cover, my arms.*" The dog then tried to carry home the discarded articles; but after repeating the "*Tchishka Äliu-*

i-wa'-ga, etc.," the ungrateful man finished by cutting his own neck, so that the head (nu'sh) was the only remaining member. The head traveled on and on for miles and miles over the earth. The end of the story is as follows:

Tu'paksh ga'lampaga, itkalpěli'n na'nuktua pue'dshish ki,
 (His sister followed him, picking up everything he had cast away
 sxa'tkalshka ska'tchampěle; tchu'i ga'tpa shtinā'shtat, te'lhin
 (and) in (her) basket carried (it) home; after arriving at the lodge, she looked down
 shlä-a' nū'sh pila pa'pkash. Ga-uloltecha'mpěle tu'paksh, tch'hū'nk
 (and) saw (his) head only; it was eating. Stepped down (from the sister, and
 the lodge top)

ska'lšan vusho'kanksh. Nen ka-ta'nian.
 putting down (the basket) was What is said, (goes) so far.
 thoroughly frightened.

II. THE ROBIN REDBREAST—A CRADLE SONG.

Una'sh, una'sh kima'dsh pa'tak	— —' — —' — —' — —'
una'sh, una'sh wala'sh pa'tak	— —' — —' — —' — —'
una'sh, una'sh tshiwi'p, tsivi'p	— —' — —' — —' — —'
tchi'tch, tsī'ts, tchi'tch.	—' —' —'

Early in the morning will eat ants (the robin),
 early, early will it pick at the cedar-tree,
 early in the morn (it chatters:) tchiwi'p, tchiwi'p,
 Tchītch, tsīts, tchītch.

This very pretty song is also sung in the following strain:

Una'sh pa'tak kimā'dsh p's'w'p,
 una'sh pa'tak kimā'dsh wi'sxak,
 una'sh, una'sh p's'w'p, p's'w'p.
 tchi'tch, p's'w'p, tsī'ts.

The cradle song graphically depicts the habits of the wi'sxak or robin, which is seen earlier than other birds flying toward the cedar to pick at the bark in search of ants. The mothers tell their babes that Robin Redbreast sings the above p's'w'p song to its young and sometimes also to its grandmother. The grandmother often plays a part in bird-lore; the ō'lash or gray dove when raising its plaintive voice is supposed to utter complaints before its grandmother.

III. SATIRIC SONG.

K'u'-i ak mīsh nē'pkia Ku'huasht' hū nunatu'ga.
 — — —' | — —' | — — | —' — | —' — | —' —
 "Uneasy you feel at Koha'shti for its numerous pyres."

This is a dance-song composed by the people of Ya'-aga, the main settlement of the E'-ukshikni or Klamath Lake Indians on the lower course of Williamson river. In spite of its serious wording it is in satiric allusion to the inhabitants of Koha'shti or Guhua'shkutchi, "boat-starting place," or lake harbor, three miles north. It also applies, by a sort of word-play or calembour, to Kuya'ga, "little bad place," a settlement near Ya'-aga, the allusion occurring in the first two words: k'u'-i ak, *uneasily perhaps*. The song is of an earlier date than the Modoc war of 1872-1873, and refers to the frequent cremations which once took place at Koha'shti, probably after an epidemic. The idea of "numerous" is not expressed by a separate word, but lies in nunatu'ga, the *distributive* verbal causative of nu'ta, *to burn*: nutu'ga, *on account of one cremation*; nunatu'ga, *on account of so many or several cremations*. The incremation of the dead was abolished among the Klamath Lake and Modoc Indians in 1868, four years after the conclusion of their treaty with the Government.

GLOSSARY TO THE TEXTS.

For a more thorough understanding of these poetical specimens, a glossary for the linguistic analysis of each term is added. The emphasized syllables are made distinct by an acute accent, which is here placed after the vowel, as in shle'a and shlä-a', *to see*. Long syllables show the macron (̄), short ones the breve (˘), and these, enlarged, are used also to give an idea, however slight, of the metrics in two of the songs.

ak, hak, *only, but*. When used as a suffix, it forms diminutive nouns, which end in -a'ga, -ak, -ka, etc.

Äliu-iwa'ga, name of a dog. The diminutive ending -a'ga shows it to be of an endearing or charitable import.

e'na, *to carry ONE long object, as a person*. Used here for "carrying on the back" a bride to her future husband, a custom prevailing throughout the Pacific Coast tribes, and performed by one of her nearest relatives. To carry MANY long objects is i'dsha.

ga'lampaga, *to march behind, or in a file; to follow somebody going*.

ga'tpa, *to come to, arrive at a distance from the one speaking*. Cf. ge'pka.

ga-ulol'tcha, *to go down, descend upon the outside ladder or steps of a winter-lodge*. Ga-ulol'tcha'mpële, *to return by descending in the same manner*.

ge'pgapëli, *to come back, to return to the starting place or home of the one speaking*.

ge'pkā, *to come*; ge'pk' i, *come thou*, imperative form. Used when the coming is a coming toward the one speaking. Cf. ga'tpa.

ge'-u, *my, mine*.

gi, *to tell, to say*; gi'tki gi'ug mish, *in order to tell you*.

hai, ai, a particle which is in most instances intranslatable, but refers to acts or things *seen or visible*: "as you see."

hi'shuaksh, (1) *husband*; (2) *male person*. Literally "consort, associate."

hū, Modoc particle for hū'k, hūnk in Klamath; points to *distance* in time and space.

i, *thou, you*; mish, *thee, you*, the objective case of i.

i'tkal, *to find, to pick up* long objects as sticks, boxes, garments, etc.; i'tkalpeli, *to pick them up again, repeatedly*.

ka, *so much*; ka-ta'nian, *so much of it, extending so far in length or size*. Modocs use this term to say that a story told has come to an end.

kā'dshika, *to be tired, exhausted, fagged out*; kādshigo'ga, verbal causative: *on account of being tired*.

kimā'dsh, *ant*; lit.: "the one who travels sidewise."

kōsh, kūsh, *pine-tree*.

Ku'huashti, "at the boat-starting place" on the northeastern end of Upper Klamath lake, Lake county, Oregon. See remarks in Text.

k'u'-i, *badly, wretchedly, uneasily, mournfully*.

lu'paksh, *chalk, lime-substance*.

mish, *thee, you, to thee, to you*; the objective case of i, *thou*.

mu'luash, *tool, implement*, and applying to conjurers' practices only. Literally: "what makes ready," from mu'lua, *to be ready*.

nā, abbrev. from nāt, nād, *we*.

na'nuktna, *everything, and every sort of thing*; compound of na'nuk, *every, all*, and tua', *which thing?* and *thing in general*.

nen, particle corresponding to our: *as they say, as reported, as you hear*.

n̄'pkia, the medial form of nē'pkā; *to feel, to have a sensation*. Refers here to sensations of a sickly, disagreeable kind, the adverb k'u'-i, *badly*, being added to the verb.

nū, I, nu'tak, *myself*; its objective case is nūsh, nish, *me, to me*.

nū'sh, *head*. nū'sh pi'la, *the head only, as a head only*.

nū'sh-tilansnä'-ash, *rollhead owl*; Speotyto hypogea.

nu'ta, *to burn, cremate*. nunatu'ga, *on account of repeated cremations (of bodies)*.

ō'lash, ū'lsh (1) *white hair or down*; (2) *mourning dove*, whose note is ū-ō; Zenaidura carolinensis. A derivative is ū'lshaltko, *gray-haired or having gray down*.

pa'ka, *to eat, to feed on*; pa'pkash, *eating for a while, or continually*.

pi'lan is a compound of pi'la *only* and n, abbr. from nū *I, myself.*
p's'w'p, imitation of the robin's note.

pu'edsha, *to throw or cast away.* pue'dshish ki, *he was or had been throwing away.*

shle'a, *to see, perceive;* shlä-a', *she saw at the time.*

shtinā'sh, *lodge, wigwam, house.* shtināshtat, locative case: *at (her) wigwam.*
shui'na, *to sing;* shuino'ta, verbal durative: *while singing.*

shui'sh (1) *song;* (2) *conjurer's song,* and also *conjurer's song-object,* these being mainly animals invoked by the conjurer to find out the disease of the patient.

ska'lxa, *to put down a basket or similar implement;* ska'lxan is participle of the present tense: *putting it down.*

ska'tcha, *to carry something in a basket or similar implement.* ska'tchampéle, *to carry back or home in a basket.*

sxa'tkalsh, *basket.* sxa'tkalshka, instrumental case: *in (her) basket.*

tak (1) particle not easy to translate, but marking contrast or contrary statements; (2) when appended to verbal stems it forms a future tense in Modoc, as in pa'tak, *it will eat,* for pa'n tak; pa'n, *to eat.* Pa-ua'pka is another form for the future tense.

ta'l'a, adv., *straightly; only, but.* ta'l'a ak, *just only.*

tam'no'l'a, *to return from,* kōsh, *from the pine tree.* Derivative of ta'mēnu *to travel.*

tch'hunk, *and then;* abbreviated from tchu'i hunk.

tchi'ska, *pet, darling;* the ending -ka (-aga, -ak, -aka) shows it to be a diminutive form.

tchi'tch, tsī'ts, imitations of the note of the robin redbreast.

tchiwi'p, imitation of the note of the robin redbreast.

tcho'kash, *leg and legs.*

tchu'i, *then, afterward, and.*

tchu'yesh, *any head-cover, as cap, hat, ornamental head-dress.*

te'lhi, *to look down to the ground;* *to look into,* as into a lodge or wigwam.
Te'lhin, *looking into.*

tilalua'nsha, *to roll about, to turn around, to revolve,* v. intr.

tu'pakship, abbr. tu'paksh, *younger sister.* Modocs use the word more frequently in the generic sense of *sister.*

una'sh, û'nash, and u'na, *at an early hour.*

vusho'kanka, *to be scared or frightened for a while or thoroughly.*

vuto'dshna, *to throw off, to cast away* while going or traveling.

wä'k, wëk, *arm and arms.*

wa'kshna, *moccasin,* sing. and plural.

watcha'ga, wa'tchag, *dog.*

wi'sxak, *robin redbreast,* Merula migratoria.

